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PRIORITIZING QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES:
LAYING A VISION FOR TOMORROW (JOINT VISION 2010)

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

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Preface

As an Air Force Services (MWR) officer, my exposure to various quality of life areas as well as exposure to many senior DoD leaders has given me a unique perspective from which to view the current retention and quality of life crisis. Two truths are apparent to me. First, our senior leaders are sincere in their efforts to take care of people and improve the military as a way of life. Second, while many of the men and women in uniform are dedicated to what they do there is still great discord and dissatisfaction within the ranks. Unfortunately, troop dissatisfaction seems to demonstrate itself through ever-decreasing retention rates within all the Services. In formulating my research direction, I sought an answer to "why" the perception gap exists between senior DoD leadership and personnel in the "field." What I discovered is best described as a "break in the links" of the communication chain. While feedback is sought the formats used are not fully developed resulting in leadership having to rely too much on "gut feel" and personal values that may be generational when making decisions. Drawing on the Services' most outcome-oriented survey approaches, I have attempted to present concrete methods for defining troop priorities and doing away with the "wild goose chase" of the current system.

I am indebted to Lt Col Steven Hansen for his encouragement and invaluable advice for this research. Special thanks also go to Mr. Gerry Wilgrove, U.S. Navy Personnel Command, and Mr. Charles Hamilton, U.S. Air Force Personnel Center, for their assistance in gathering survey materials.

Abstract

Quality of life has become more than simply taking care of people. Throughout the DoD, retention of trained personnel has become a top concern and is compounded by the inability to recruit sufficient numbers to refill the ranks. The heart of the issue is increased missions, decreased personnel, insufficient equipment, too much time away from family, too little leisure time, and not enough money to balance out these negatives. Today's active duty military force is 33% smaller and three times more deployed than it was just ten years ago—meaning more are gone for longer periods and do it more often. The strong economy only compounds the problem because alternatives to staying in the military are abundant. Despite increased emphasis from the Department of Defense's (DoD) leadership to stave the degradation of benefits and pay, quality of life within the ranks continues to suffer. This paper looks at the various quality of life (QoL) surveys utilized within the DoD and the information they provide leadership. Drawing from the best of the current surveys and filling in the gaps, four cross-DoD surveys are recommended to better ascertain which QoL areas most impact troop retention. The goal is to better understand the attitudes and opinions of the men and women in the "field" so that leadership can hone in on those issues that will most impact QoL and ultimately retention.

Part 1

Introduction

Recruiting and retaining high quality people will remain our first priority.

— Joint Vision 2010

Know the terrain.

— Tom Stovall,
The Art of War for Executives

Joint Vision 2010 clearly states the priorities of the Department of Defense (DoD) are mission readiness through recruiting and retaining high quality personnel. While mission readiness is viewed as the “ends,” high quality people (combined with superior equipment) are considered the “means.”¹ The demands placed on military members to meet mission requirements has an impact on the Services’ ability to recruit and, more importantly, to retain quality people. Today’s environment is one of increased deployments, downsized forces, longer work days, fewer resources, and more time away from families. Competing against a booming economy, retention and its relationship to readiness have become the top priority for the nation’s armed forces. Services measure mission readiness using operational readiness inspections, exercises, etc. They report on retention rates but measure the retention climate using personnel and quality of life (QoL) surveys, presuming that a high perception of QoL leads to higher retention. The Services address this relationship as QoL, encompassing a myriad of areas that

are believed to effect how military members view their military careers. Operational issues such as deployment frequency, organizational climate, health care, leisure activities, pay, housing and more are considered to have impact on whether our military men and women choose to stay in the armed forces or leave for employment in the civilian sector.² As a result, focusing on QoL for America's soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines isn't about doing what's nice, it's about doing what's necessary to compete for critical personnel resources in today's competitive job market.³

The Services and DoD attempt to measure QoL periodically using a variety of survey instruments. While assessments of QoL allow policy makers to identify trends in satisfaction, dissatisfaction, need, or working conditions, such assessments do not generally provide feedback regarding which QoL areas are of greatest importance to the military member and their family. This makes it hard for leaders to identify QoL problems and harder to know how to prioritize limited resources to fix them. As a result, senior leadership prioritizes which policies to pursue and the associated expenditure of resources according to what they believe is needed and wanted rather than fact.⁴ In FY 2000 it was retirement benefit restoration and pay and in FY 2001 the target will be reducing out-of-pocket housing expense (BAH) and TRICARE.⁵ Along the way, regular appropriations are diverted out of construction projects for fitness, childcare, dining facilities, and dormitories. Combined with the dollars placed in accounts funding daily operation requirements for equipment, supplies, base utilities, procurement of new systems, and MWR activities, the dollars are in high demand and can be spread very thin.

Therefore, recognizing the vast efforts undertaken by DoD and the Services to improve the QoL of today's forces, this paper looks at the various QoL surveys utilized within the DoD and the information they provide leadership. Drawing from the best of the current surveys and filling

in the gaps, four cross-DoD surveys are recommended to better ascertain which QoL areas most impact the retention of quality forces and achievement of the objectives outlined in *Joint Vision 2010*. With this aim in mind, the analysis is presented in three main sections. The first section provides an introduction addressing the connection between quality of life (QoL) and personnel retention and why both are receiving significant attention from DoD. To give scope to this problem, this section then reviews what is actually included in "quality of life" and the fiscal resources dedicated to paying for QoL items. Once the background is defined, the second section provides an analysis and discussion of the various measurement tools. In this analysis and discussion section, surveys addressing the quality of life in each of the Services as well as DoD-wide studies are explained including their major findings and recommendations. The third section brings the "lessons learned" together to formulate a plan for prioritizing needs and allocating scarce resources using four DoD-sponsored surveys, demographic specific analyses, and marketing initiatives that connect QoL initiatives with troop-provided feedback. Finally, a brief conclusion is provided.

Notes

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Vision 2010*, 1997, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 30 January 2000, available from <http://www.dtic.mil/jv2010/jvpub.htm>.

² Alan W. Wicker, *Quality of Life and Military Outcomes: A Conceptual Framework and Suggestions for Planned Research* (San Diego, Calif.: Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, 1996), 1.

³ Editorial, "Follow the Quality-Of-Life Leader," *Air Force Times*, 6 October 1997, 31.

⁴ Elyse W. Kerce, *Quality of Life in the U.S. Marine Corps* (San Diego, Calif.: Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, 1995), 10.

⁵ Jim Garamone, "Proposed Defense Budget Attacks Housing, Medical Problems," *Defenselink*, 7 February 2000, no. 4; on-line, Internet, 7 February 2000, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2000/n02072000_20002074.html.

Part 2

Background

The Relevance of Quality of Life (QoL) as Priority

Quality of life has become a buzzword within the Department of Defense. Rarely will a publication referencing DoD or Service issues not use the phrase “quality of life” in its text. Why such an interest?

Quality of life within the armed forces is not a new phenomenon. Since the days of the Revolutionary War emphasis has been placed on the “care and feeding” of the troops. While this emphasis has always been linked to accomplishing the job at hand (defeating the enemy), keeping the right numbers of healthy personnel in the ranks took on new meaning after WWII and the establishment of a large standing military in peacetime and the advent of the all-volunteer force in 1973.¹

At various times over the past thirty years a strong U.S. job market has threatened retention of quality military personnel. However, never have the challenges been so great as those of the past decade. Since the late 1980s, force structure has reduced by over 900,000 or 33%. At the same time the armed forces’ share of the U.S. budget as a percent of Gross National Product (GNP) has fallen by over 50%. In contrast, our military personnel deploy an average of three times more than they did just a decade ago.² Since the fall of the Iron Curtain the U.S. has become the world’s premier crisis manager. Unfortunately, this increase in mission has occurred

simultaneously with severe cuts in dollars and manpower while the U.S. economy is booming and civilian jobs are plentiful and well paying. Combine this with an environment in which 95% of U.S. military personnel have graduated from high school, 60% score in the top half of aptitude exams, and nearly 70% have at least some college.³ In addition to the push towards education, today's military personnel generally are technically trained, disciplined, and team oriented. These characteristics which serve our nation's military well also are heavily sought after by civilian organizations wishing to recruit and hire quality people.

How serious is the retention problem? Serious—it is the #1 concern across DoD. For example, the Air Force missed its enlistment goals in all three categories—first term, second term, and career airmen. Additionally, pilot retention dropped from 87% in FY 95 to just 41% for FY 99.⁴ The Navy is suffering poor retention in each of its personnel categories as well; an average of six percentage points lower than needed for first, second, and third termers. Surface warfare officers are exiting at such alarming rates that only 25% stay long enough to serve as department heads—so far below requirements that a \$50,000 bonus was implemented in FY 2000.⁵ The Army too has experienced gaps in manning with only 29% of junior officers staying past their current obligation and a 3000-person shortage of captains.⁶ When recruiting and retention goals can't be met, vacancies and end-strength shortages result, which puts more stress on the rest of the people to meet mission readiness requirements. The catch-22 is that deployment tempo is higher than ever staffed by fewer people. As a result of more personnel exiting the ranks, fewer coming in to replace them, and increased numbers of personnel deployment the problem becomes critical. Clearly, these linkages illustrate why addressing quality of life and improving retention is the top concern for DoD officials since having the right numbers of troops is paramount to be ready to deter or fight the nation's wars/conflicts.

Given this demand for high quality personnel, how do the armed services compete? Certainly slogans such as "See the World" and "One of the Few and the Proud" catch the attention of some young people. However, the opportunity to travel or be part of the "Marine elite" will not keep our best and brightest in the armed forces. Some researchers have noted the interrelationship between quality of life and family well being to satisfaction, job productivity, member retention, and readiness.⁷ While many military members simply desire to serve the nation, live in different places, experience a variety of jobs, and have increased responsibility these issues can be outweighed by basic personal and family needs such as pay, benefits, education, medical care, personal freedom, and leisure time. For most who serve today, the decision regarding whether to continue wearing "the uniform" is neither simple nor easy.

What is Quality of Life (QoL)?

Quality of life has come to represent anything within the military environment that positively or negatively impacts how military members (or their families) perceive military service. While each Service includes different aspects, the Air Force's definition seems to be an adequate representation of the other Services. The Department of Defense generally defines quality of life by seven key areas:

1. **Compensation and Benefits**—provide compensation that keeps pace with the private sector and inflation along with a strong benefits program to complement compensation's basic objective of attracting, retaining, and motivating a volunteer force.
2. **Balanced OPTEMPTO/PERSTEMPO**—Since the armed forces are fast becoming more of an expeditionary force, based on the continental U.S., support programs that help military members and their families make the corresponding cultural transition must be continued. The numbers of days individuals/units are away from home are monitored in efforts to limit the time away from home (varies according to Service). Global tasking management, Reserve and Guard participation, and family readiness programs are all intended to help mitigate the impact of escalating contingency demands on units and families.
3. **Safe, adequate, and affordable housing**—Comfortable homes and safe neighborhoods, both on and off base. Through a combination of military construction, privatization

initiatives, and housing allowance reform, efforts are underway to reduce family housing and dormitory improvements projects backlog and limit the amount of out-of-pocket housing expenses associated with living off base.

4. **Quality health care**—As the number of military treatment facilities declines and health care costs increase, TRICARE is helping to meet the objective of providing military members and families high-quality medical coverage.
5. **Support for Community Programs**—Enhance programs providing a sense of community for single members and those with families facing relocation and deployments. Much of the total force thrust of quality of life strategy is focused in this area and includes fitness centers, childcare, youth programs, and other traditional Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs.
6. **Preserving Military Retirement Systems and Benefits**—The stability of the current retirement system and the preservation of the purchasing power of retired pay is crucial to future retention efforts. A solid benefits package, like continuing medical coverage and cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), compensates for the extraordinary demands placed on military personnel over the course of their careers.
7. **Educational Opportunities**—Providing educational opportunities through tuition-assistance funding (varies by Service) and expanding and funding the Montgomery GI Bill.⁸

In addition to these traditional focus areas, the General Accounting Office (GAO) in a recent report to DoD suggests that two additional areas be considered quality of life concerns:

1) availability of needed parts and equipment; and 2) unit manning.⁹ While these two areas have not been specifically included by the Services in their assessments of quality of life, they have inferred their impact on QoL. For instance, the climate assessments and survey of work hours included in all the Services' QoL surveys confirm that "doing more with less" is lengthening the duty day and decreasing time available for personal and family leisure.¹⁰ The significance of not having sufficient parts and equipment to accomplish the job is best characterized by comments shared with Secretary of Defense Cohen during an August 1999 visit to Moody AFB, Georgia. During that visit a communications specialist told Secretary Cohen how radios had to be borrowed in order for a Moody unit to deploy for Operation Desert Thunder and a maintenance boss shared that the wing had eight aircraft with broken engines and no parts were available to repair the planes. Additionally, a wing pilot told Cohen that she had

been unable to complete required upgrade training because there weren't enough planes to fly—not only negatively impacting unit readiness and possibly negatively impacting her career progression. A 1999 study by the General Accounting Office (GAO) discovered that maintenance personnel had spent about 178,000 hours cannibalizing parts from B-1B, F-16, and C-5 aircraft to replace broken items on other aircraft. This equates to about 43 people working 8 hours a day, 5 days a week for 2 years.¹¹

Obviously, poor availability of needed supplies and equipment not only increase the workday and the amount of stress on military personnel but also compounds manning shortfalls. Likewise, manning shortfalls, compounded by higher OPTSTEMPO, can seriously degrade quality of life and readiness. The shortage of mid-grade NCOs (E-5s and E-6s) throughout the Services is an example.¹² Since these NCOs are the backbone of all military units they are the primary trainers of new recruits. With mid-grade NCOs in short supply training suffers and therefore readiness suffers. The shortages are equally apparent in the officer ranks. For example, the U.S. Army's Forces Command reported that its units contain only 56-60% of their authorized strength in majors. As a result, more junior personnel are required to assume greater responsibility. These illustrations make it clearer why availability of needed parts and equipment and unit manning are QoL issues. Ignoring manning shortages and parts/equipment cannibalization result in OPSTEMPO/PERSTEMPO being misapplied to explain the stresses experienced by today's military personnel. Therefore, to get a complete picture of QoL and how it affects personnel retention and readiness—the emphasis of *Joint Vision 2010*—it is appropriate to focus on these nine core areas.

How Much Does Quality of Life (QoL) Cost?

As the previous section shows, issues regarding QoL are extensive. Putting a price on some key QoL items gives significance to how complicated "improving quality of life" can be. Table 1 illustrates some of the recent initiatives taken to improve quality of life and their life-cycle costs. A 4.8% pay raise equates to \$7 Billion in current and future out-years while eliminating median out-of-pocket housing costs will cost approximately \$3 Billion. Improving TRICARE access, decreasing co-pays, and enhancing pharmacy and retiree benefits is expected to cost between \$3 billion and \$5 billion.

Table 1 Quality of Life Breakdown of DoD Budget Items (\$ Billions)

	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00	FY 01
Pay Raise, Pay Table Reform, Military Retirement Reform and pay raises to DoD civilians total about \$35 billion			35 (over 6 years)	
4.8% Annual Pay Raise			7	
TRICARE Modifications				3-5
BHA Increases (Reduce median out of pocket expense to \$0)				3 (over 5 years)
MWR Programs (Appropriated Only)	1.35	1.43		
Housing Operating and Maintenance (345,000 units; \$8115/yr/unit)			2.8	
Active Duty Personnel Education Benefits		.125	.34	.33
Reserve/Guard Personnel Education Benefits (Note: Nearly 4 times greater than active duty expenditure for FY 00 and FY 01 includes post-separation benefits)		.103	.125	.136
Recruiting	.140	.268	Estimated .350	

Sources:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/1998/s19980312-becraft.html>, <http://www.dtic.mil/comptroller/fy2001budget/fy2001ml.pdf>,
http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2000/b02072000_bt047-00.html, http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb1999/n02231999_9902233.html
http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep1999/n09281999_9909282.html, http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar1997/n03131997_9703132.html
http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar1999/n03221999_9903221.html

Table 2 DoD Budget Authority by Title - FY 2001 President's Budget (\$ Billions)

	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00	FY 01	FY 02	FY 03	FY 04	FY 05
Military Personnel	69.8	70.7	73.7	75.8	78.4	80.4	83.1	85.6
Operation & Maintenance	97.2	105.0	104.9	109.3	107.5	109.1	112.2	114.8
Procurement	44.7	50.9	54.2	60.3	63.0	66.7	67.7	70.9
RDT&E	37.1	38.3	38.4	37.9	38.4	37.6	37.5	36.4
Military Construction	5.4	5.4	4.8	4.5	4.3	3.8	4.6	5.4
Family Housing	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.7	3.9	4.0	4.1
Funds, Receipts, & Other	-2.2	4.6	.4	-.2	-.5	-.5	-.7	-.7
Total DoD (051)	258.5	278.4	279.9	291.1	294.8	300.9	308.3	316.4
Note: Budgets reflect an average 3.2% yearly increase from 98 to 01								

Sources: http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2000/b02072000_bt045-00.html and <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/almanac/almanac/money/breakout.html>

As Table 2 illustrates, military housing costs \$3.6 billion in FY 2000 and military construction costs \$4.8 billion. Since a lack of needed parts and equipment has been noted as a QoL concern, it is interesting that Operations and Maintenance (\$109.3 billion) proposed for the FY 2001 budget is expected to result in stocks remaining at their current level of availability. Troops can expect no better equipment despite claims from Air Force officials that spare parts for 2001 are fully funded.¹³ Furthermore, manning is expected to drop slightly. As a result, unless base realignment is accomplished quickly, no relief is in sight for unit manning issues.

Educational benefits are also of particular interest. As Table 1 points out, education benefits across all of DoD are funded at approximately \$160 million for 2000 and 2001. Putting this in perspective, twice as much was budgeted for recruiting than for education benefits; a bit surprising given that "education opportunity" is one of the most valued quality of life programs among the troops. Additionally, \$1.43 billion was expended in FY 1999 on MWR programs to include fitness, enlisted dining, youth/child care, and oversight of other community enhancing programs such as bowling, golf, skills development, clubs, etc.¹⁴ Other initiatives in the FY 2001 budget intended to improve quality of life include: \$50 million for marine barracks construction,¹⁵ \$5 million in bonuses for aircraft mechanics who reenlist for 6 years,¹⁶ \$90

million in Army reenlistment bonuses,¹⁷ and \$2.5 billion for depot aircraft maintenance.¹⁸ The Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) initiative for FY 2001 to reduce out-of-pocket expenses from 19% to 15% is priced at approximately \$160 million.¹⁹

These facts and figures only emphasize that readiness, retention, and quality of life are expensive. However, it is the price we willingly pay to ensure the armed forces are able to prevent and fight the nation's wars. Since, virtually everything from MWR, to housing, to work environment, to procurement of equipment impacts quality of life it's simple to characterize spending "for the good of the force." Unfortunately, too often budget allocations focus on the symptoms rather than on the cause or solution. It is imperative that expenditures be linked to desired outcomes—retention, and ultimately, mission readiness.

Measuring Quality of Life (QoL) Is Not Enough

Because quality of life is considered to be pervasive and constantly evolving, each of the Services tends to survey their personnel every two to three years regarding their perceptions on operational tempo, work hours, educational benefits, housing, leisure activities, etc. However, while the effort to measure military members' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with these quality of life contributors is noteworthy, they are not complete. For example, when asking troops whether they value their club, bowling center, or golf course and whether they enhance their quality of life they will most certainly respond "yes". Yet in today's environment when a restrained DoD budget must address the nine key QoL areas, provide base/post infrastructure through facility maintenance, construction, and utilities as well as acquisition tomorrow's technology and weapons, the dollars don't stretch far enough. Therefore, it is no longer significant that we simply measure satisfaction with QoL areas. Rather, the challenge is to measure QoL in a

meaningful way that allows priorities to be established by the actual users and convey that priority to senior decision-makers when making distribution of scarce resources.

Notes

¹ History of the Air Force Services Agency, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 27 January 2000, available from http://www.af.mil/news/factsheets/Air_Force_Services_Agency.html.

² VADM P. A. Tracey, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, address to Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., 22 January 2000.

³ SSG Alicia K. Borlik, "Services Grapple With Recruiting Challenges," *DefenseLink*, 22 March 1999, No. 3; on-line, Internet, 12 February 2000, available from http://defenselink.mil/news/Mar1999/n03221999_9903221.html.

⁴ SrA A. J. Bosker, "AF Holds Summit To Stem Tide in Retention," *U.S. Air Force ONLINENews*, 2 February 2000, No. 2; on-line, Internet, 3 February 2000, available from http://www.af.mil/newspaper/v2_n4_s1.htm.

⁵ John Burlage, "Personnel Chief Wants Sharper Focus on Retention Picture," *Navy Times*, 21 February 2000, 24.

⁶ LTC Michael G. Clark, *Where Have All Our Captains Gone? An Analysis of Why Junior Army Officers Are Leaving The Service* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 1999), 11.

⁷ Gary L. Bowen, "Satisfaction with Family Life in the Military," *Armed Forces & Society* 15:4 (Summer 1989), 571-593.

⁸ "Quality of Life," *Air Force Congressional Issue Papers 1998*, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 27 January 2000, available from <http://www.af.mil/lib/afissues/1998/issue98/html>.

⁹ General Accounting Office Briefing Report, *Military Personnel: Perspectives of Surveyed Members in Retention*, 16 August 1999, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 27 January 2000, available from <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov>.

¹⁰ Douglas J. Gillert, "Cohen Visits Georgia Base to Gauge Problems, Morale," *DefenseLink*, 19 August 1998, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 7 February 2000, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug1998/n08191998_9808191.html.

¹¹ General Accounting Office Chapter Report, *Air Force Supply: Management Actions Create Spare Parts Shortages and Operations Problems*, April 29, 1999, Report NO. NSIAD/AIMD-99-77, No. 36; on-line, Internet, 8 February 2000, available from <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/useftp.cgi?IPaddress=162.140.64.21&filename>

¹² Floyd D. Spence, Chairman, House Committee on National Security, *Military Readiness 1997: Rhetoric and Reality* (Washington, D.C.: The Committee, 1997), 3-6.

¹³ "Department of Defense Budget for FY 2001," *DefenseLink*, 7 February 2000, No. 9; on-line, Internet, 12 February 2000, available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2000/b02072000_bt045-00.html.

¹⁴ Carolyn H. Becraft, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel Support, Families and Education, statement to the House National Security Committee Special Oversight Panel on Morale, Welfare and Recreation, Washington, March 12, 1998, No. 11; on-line, Internet, 3 February 2000, available from <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/1998.html>.

¹⁵ Mark C. Brinkley, "Marines, Families to Fare Best in 2001 Budget," *Marine Times*, 14 February 2000, 9.

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¹⁶ Bruce Rolfsen, "Budget 2001: Air Force Spending Climbs, Barely," *Air Force Times*, 14 February 2000, 9.

¹⁷ Jim Tice, "Army's Share of 2001 Budget Biggest Since '92," *Army Times*, 14 February 2000, 9.

¹⁸ Rolfsen, 9.

¹⁹ Karen Jowers, "Cohen Plans 100% BAH," *Army Times*, 17 January 2000, 8.

Part 3

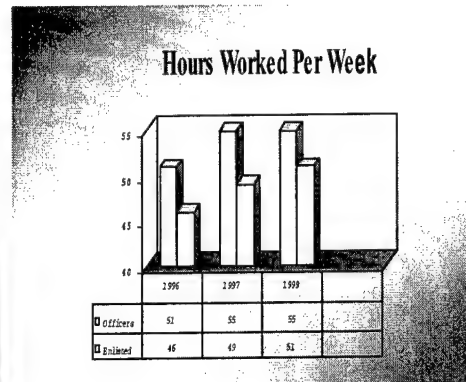
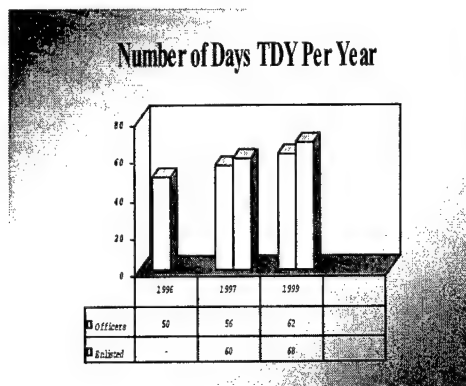
Analysis and Discussion

Each of the Services has developed regular measurement tools to gauge the level of QoL. In addition to the self-surveys utilized by the Services, other surveys such as the DoD Military Member and Spouse Survey, RAND Studies, and similar organizations periodically poll military members. Additionally, because QoL is considered to be comprehensive and slowly evolving, each Service tends to conduct surveys every two to three years regarding their perceptions on operational tempo, work hours, education benefits, housing, leisure activities, etc. Since the previous section discussed what was included in quality of life, provided a cost perspective for those areas, and emphasized the need to set priorities, this section will look at the various surveys currently being used to measure QoL and what they tell decision-makers.

Air Force

The primary tool used by the Air Force to assess quality of life is the biennial Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) Climate and Quality of Life Survey. This survey was made available to every active duty military member and civilian employee in 1997 and late in 1999. This survey is AF-wide with an average of 38% of personnel responding. Survey highlights show that 6 out of 10 military members plan on staying until retirement and 8 out of 10 civilian employees plan to stay until retirement. Additionally, perceptions regarding whether their pay is fair were down in 1999 among all active duty members except for pilots which remained steady. Furthermore,

less than one quarter of enlisted members thought pay was fair and equitable.¹ A factor weighing in to fairness of pay may be the increased hours of work per week and increased numbers of days TDY per year under salaried conditions (see charts below). Military members



also stated loud and clear that if cost weren't an issue they prefer to live off base. Regarding medical care, satisfaction levels grew (up 9% for single enlisted to 54% and up 4% for single officers to 62%) among single members but decreased among married personnel (married officer satisfaction decreased to 45% and married enlisted satisfaction decreased to 42%). Only 50% of all personnel were satisfied with education opportunities. Thirty to fifty percent of personnel said the operation tempo had impacted their ability to maintain health/fitness, maintain relationships, take leave, communicate with family, and get basic family chores done. Additionally, 59-89% of personnel said they had used the commissary, base exchange, medical care, dental care, fitness center, and library in the past 12 months; however, "use" may have been as little as once during the year since no frequency is measured. All other community programs to include tuition assistance, recreational and leisure activities, chapel, youth programs, and child development centers/family day care had been used at least once by only 10-44% of the respondents during the previous 12 months. The survey also asked members which community/QoL programs impacted productivity and mission accomplishment. Both officers

and enlisted members identified medical health care, fitness and sports activities, dental health care, personal and physical security, and education opportunities as impacting mission accomplishment. With what appears to be an effort to identify areas for outsourcing or sourcing to civilian communities, the survey asks which community programs could be provided by the community without negatively impacting Air Force members. Only one-third of respondents believed that outsourcing even portions of community programs would negatively impact their lives as military members—the remainder of respondents felt that parts or all of community programs could be provided through other than current methods.² Additionally, “healthy diversion” activities such as golf, bowling, clubs, etc., are rolled up under “recreational and leisure activities” making this question somewhat inconclusive in providing direction to policy and decision-makers. No where in this survey are respondents asked to compare facets of military life (pay, benefits, work hours, medical benefits, etc.) with what they could expect to receive if employed in the civilian sector.

In addition to the biennial CSAF Climate Assessment and Quality of Life Survey, the Air Force periodically administers a New Directions Survey to members separating from active duty and a Careers Survey to personnel who have reported they intend to remain in the Air Force for at least twenty years. The Careers Survey was administered to a random sample of officers in 1986, 1989, 1993, and to both officers and enlisted personnel in 1996. Despite this survey being targeted to individuals who had previously reported they intended to serve at least twenty years, only 60% of company grade officers and junior NCOs reiterated an intention to stay. Reasons given by officers for staying are as follows:

Officers: Reasons for Staying		
1986-1989	1993	1996
Retirement benefits	Retirement benefits	Education & training opportunities
Your Air Force job	Your Air Force job	Retirement benefits
Patriotism	Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction
Job satisfaction	Quality of coworkers	Job security
Management opportunities	Education & training opportunities	Availability of medical care

For comparative purposes, the table below presents the reasons pilots report they remain in the Air Force.

Pilots: Reasons for Staying
1996
Job satisfaction
Availability of medical care
Job security
Quality of coworkers
Pay and allowances

The only acceptable comparative data for enlisted personnel are from the 1989 Quality of Life Survey and are presented for comparative purposes.

Enlisted Personnel: Reasons for Staying	
1989	1996
Education & training opportunities	Job security
Retirement benefits	Education & training opportunities
Availability of medical care	Availability of medical care
Your Air Force job	Retirement benefits
Promotion opportunities	Your Air Force job

Since 1986, the New Directions Survey has been used to determine what influences officers to leave the Air Force. Surveying all officers with established dates of separation and to a sample of enlisted members with established dates of separation, researchers noted that the reasons for separating remained fairly consistent over time. However, during the 1990s, the Air Force underwent numerous dramatic changes. While many of the reasons for leaving military service were unchanged, increased demands for "more say" in the assignment process, and,

therefore, more geographic stability, and negative perceptions of senior leadership began to surface.

Officers: Reasons for Leaving		
1986-1989	1990-1992	1993
Say in job assignment	Availability of civilian jobs	Perceptions of AF leadership
Say in base of assignment	Say in the assignment process	Promotion opportunities
Job dissatisfaction	Geographic stability	Availability of civilian jobs
Geographic stability	Perceptions of AF leadership	Say in the assignment process

In 1996, the New Directions Survey format was changed. The new format asked separating members whether their decision to separate was primarily "personal" or whether they were "dissatisfied" with the Air Force. The majority reported their reason to leave the Air Force was because of personal reasons (65%); only 35% reported their reason to leave was based on dissatisfaction with the Air Force. However, based on their reasons for leaving listed below it appears it is really a question of whether the "glass is perceived as half empty or half full." In other words, the reasons for leaving are similar for both groups. However, one group tends to be more negative and says, "I don't like the Air Force," while the other group says, "the Air Force isn't bad but it's not for me."

Officers: 1996 Categorical Reasons	
Personal Reasons	Dissatisfaction with Air Force
Availability of civilian jobs	Say in specific job assignment
Say in base of assignment	Say in base of assignment
Job dissatisfaction	Perceptions of AF leadership
Promotion opportunities	Your Air Force job
Say in specific job assignment	Job dissatisfaction

Pilots: 1996 Categorical Reasons	
Personal Reasons	Dissatisfaction with Air Force
Availability of civilian jobs	Perceptions of AF leadership
Amount of additional duties	Say in specific job
Duration of TDYs	Say in base of assignment
Perception of AF leadership	Amount of additional duties
Promotion opportunities	Recognition of your efforts

Enlisted members were split 50/50 when asked whether they were separating because of personal reasons or dissatisfaction with the Air Force. Data on enlisted career influences are only available for 1989 and 1996 but the influences cited have remained fairly constant.³

Enlisted Personnel: Reasons for Leaving

1989	1996
Pay and allowances	Perceptions of AF leadership
Perceptions of AF leadership	Job dissatisfaction
Say in base of assignment	Recognition of your efforts
Promotion opportunities	Promotion opportunities
Recognition of your efforts	Pay and allowances

In analyzing Air Force studies, MWR surveys also came to the forefront. Because this area is so often included in QoL Surveys used throughout the various Services and DoD, it seems appropriate to summarize customer input regarding how these programs impact their quality of life. Unfortunately, the surveys conducted by the Air Force Services Agency tend to only target existing customers. Despite this focus, some valuable information can be gleaned regarding areas that impact satisfaction with military life. For instance, fitness center users said that childcare was one of the more significant, desired changes that would enhance their use and enjoyment of the facilities. Additionally, like many of the other study results discussed in this paper, military personnel and their families tend to use MWR recreational and leisure activities on a limited basis. For instance, of the various outdoor recreation programs only swimming pools are used more than similar facilities provided off base. Library use is equal on and off base. Frequent family use of golf and bowling facilities tends to be slightly higher off base. Surprisingly, eating facilities are much more frequented downtown regardless of whether eating lunch or dinner. Last, skills development centers are used more on base by infrequent users—frequent users of skills centers tend to utilize off-base programs. While the CSAF Climate Assessment and Quality of Life Survey respondents said that recreational and leisure activities

(MWR) impacted their sense of community, setting resource priorities using this data would likely not meet Service members' expectations. While some of these programs could clearly be supplied through community partnerships, it is difficult to understand the impact to "a sense of community" without specific input and prioritization by military personnel and their families.

Army

The primary tool for measuring satisfaction with Army life is administered by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel. Through this office a series of surveys are distributed to targeted groups to identify areas of concerns to soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Michael Clark summarized many of the Army's most recent surveys in his Army War College paper entitled "Where Have All Our Captains Gone? An Analysis of Why Junior Army Officers Are Leaving the Service." In his research, LTC Clark found that only 42% of company grade officers planned to make the Army a career. Of most concern, only 29% of junior officers planned to stay beyond their current obligation. Further, studies conducted by the Army Research Institute and the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis reflected that captain's base pay had lost nearly \$19 per year in terms of real income. In a 1998 Sample Survey of Military Personnel, basic pay was the number one reason for leaving the Army. Additionally, the Army Research Institute found that only 16% of Army officers thought the Army had a better standard of living than the civilian sector, down by from 36% in 1992. To make matters worse, only 9% believed QoL was better in the Army, down from 29% in 1992. Furthermore, between 50%-62% of officers believe retirement benefits are better in the civilian sector.⁴ All three are significant findings since DoD leadership has traditionally viewed quality of life and retirement opportunities among the best available and far above what's available in the civilian job market.

In the spring of 1999 the Army conducted another survey entitled "Sample Survey of Military Personnel." Again, there was little good news for Army leaders. Only 36% of company grade officers and 49% of junior NCOs intend to remain in the Army until retirement. Approximately, one-third of company grade officers and junior NCOs said they would leave the army at the end of their current obligation; down from 1993 when more than half the Army's junior officers said they intended to make the service a career.⁵ That figure has fallen 15 percentage points in the last six years, and six percentage points in the last year alone. The top reasons why junior enlisted and officers say they'll quit the Army are:

Reasons Soldiers Are Leaving	
Enlisted	Officers
Amount of basic pay	Amount of time separated from family
Overall quality of Army life	Overall quality of Army life
Amount of time separated from family	Amount of basic pay
	Amount of job satisfaction

In a RAND published paper titled "Army Life v. Life in the Army: The Relationship Between Quality of Life Program Utilization and Army Career Intentions," provides focus on quality of life/community programs. Most relevant to this project is the finding that virtually none of the quality of life programs were used by even half the sample. Other than housing, the only exceptions are a few routine medical services, the library, the gym, and clubs. In fact, most of the programs are not used by even 25% of the sample, and many are used by less than 1%. Additionally, most respondents stated that their income was only "somewhat adequate" in meeting needs. Asked to compare six dimensions of Army life with a career that could realistically be expected in the civilian sector, the Army fared worst in the area of pay.⁶

Marine Corps

In 1993, the Navy Personnel Research and Development Center administered an on-site survey to Marine participants at large installations, and by mail to participants at remote or relatively installations. However, only 10,000 marines were surveyed—or just 6% of the Marine Corps military personnel. Despite the low percentage of personnel being surveyed, distribution among the ranks was comparable to actual Marine Corps force breakdown.⁷ Unlike the Army and Air Force surveys, the Marine Corps survey tends to be complicated due to its breakdown into “domains.” Domains in the order of their presentation were:

Residence	Relations with other relatives
Neighborhood	Friends and friendships
Leisure and recreation	Income/standard of living
Health	Job
Marriage/intimate relationships	Self
Relations with children	

Marines were also asked to compare each QoL domain to what they expected in the civilian sector. Most believed that it was easier to make friends in the Marine Corps and that being in the Corps had advanced their personal development. The respondents also said that they were just about as likely to have their ideal job in the Marines as in civilian life. They did, however, believe they were financially worse off than they would be as civilians, and that their neighborhoods were a bit worse as well.⁸ Additionally, participants were asked to rate each domain and the extent to which each affected career plans:

Table 3 Extent to Which Various Aspects of Life Affects Career Paths

(1 being most important, 11 being least important)

Domain	Overall	Personnel Leaving	Personnel Staying
Residence	8	8	8
Neighborhood	10	9	9
Leisure and Recreation	6	7	7
Health	7	10	6
Friends and friendships	11	11	10
Marriage or intimate relationship	3	5	5
Children	5	3	4
Relatives	9	4	11
Income and standard of living	1	1	2
Job	2	2	1
Self	4	6	3

Rankings by personnel staying and overall respondents tended to be very similar. However, individuals choosing to leave placed greater emphasis on relationships with relatives and felt they could develop more fully outside of the Marine Corps. There is no explanation as to why individuals leaving ranked the health domain so low except that they believed their health would be similar in or out of the Corps and that it had little influence on their career plans.


Using data regarding emphasis on self and family, the Corps developed proactive programs to help couples cope with the stresses of military life, and required Marines to participate in premarital counseling programs.⁹

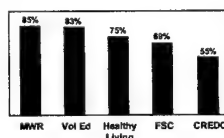
Navy

The Navy's primary measure of sailor's satisfaction with the Navy has been its annual Navy-wide personnel survey. Since 1990, random samples of enlisted and officer personnel have been queried regarding their opinions and attitudes towards Navy programs that materially effect the performance and morale of sailors.¹⁰ In a 1998 comparison of trends in the 1990-1997

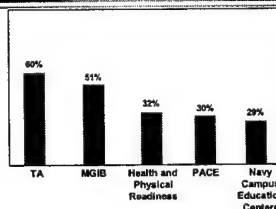
surveys, pay and retention woes came to the forefront. Only 50% of officers and 25% of enlisted believed they were paid adequately. Despite annual adjustments to pay, perceptions of adequacy of pay has virtually remained level since 1993. Additionally, intentions to continue Navy service showed distinct negative trends. Among enlisted sailors, 36% were certain they would leave the Navy, up 5-9% from 1990-1991. A fairly steady number, 42%, believed they would stay past their current enlistment. Officer intentions, while a bit more positive, also showed disturbing trends in the “will leave” category. Twenty-six percent of officers definitely planned to leave, up 8% since 1990. Similarly, those who planned to stay had dropped from 62% in 1990 to 57% in 1997.¹¹


In 1997, the Navy redirected its efforts to measure sailors’ satisfaction with Navy-life by developing a quality of life survey separate from the annual personnel survey. This new QoL survey was intended to assist Navy leadership in allocating resources. Another aim of the survey was to measure usage of support programs, the influence programs have on readiness, and the impact reducing or eliminating those programs would have on sailors’ career intentions. Methodology included random sampling with 15,000 surveys distributed and 38% of surveys completed. Education programs, sports and fitness ashore, recreation activities ashore, and MWR programs afloat were utilized by well more than half the respondents. Surprisingly, child and youth programs were utilized by only 25% of the respondents. Additionally, the measure

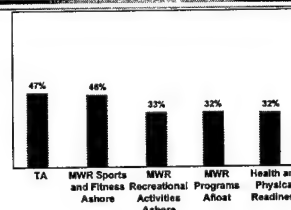
 **Program Importance for Maintaining Sailor’s Readiness—Leaders**



 **Most Important Programs for Maintaining Personal Readiness—Enlisted**



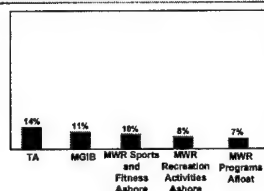
 **Most Important Programs for Maintaining Personal Readiness—Officers**



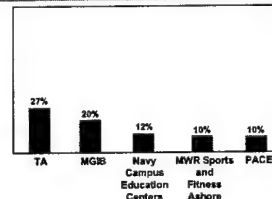
Acronym Definition: FSC = Family Support Center; CREDO = Personal Growth and Marriage Retreats; TA = Tuition Assistance; MCIB = Montgomery GI Bill; PACE = Program for Afloat College Program

of programs influence on readiness was measured both from the leader's perspective and by users. Leaders stated they believed MWR to have the most impact. However, enlisted personnel didn't even rank MWR and officers rated it only half as important as did the Navy leaders. Also reflecting a new approach at developing priorities, this survey asked personnel which program reductions or elimination would likely cause them to reconsider their decision to stay in the Navy. Tuition assistance seemed to have the most impact with 27% of enlisted and 14% of

Would Reconsider Decision to Stay If Programs Reduced or Eliminated—Officers



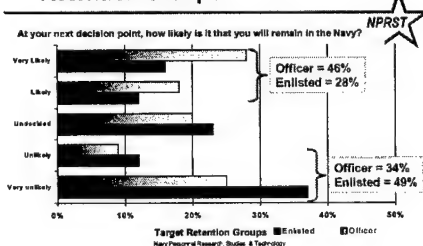
Would Reconsider Decision to Stay If Programs Reduced or Eliminated—Enlisted



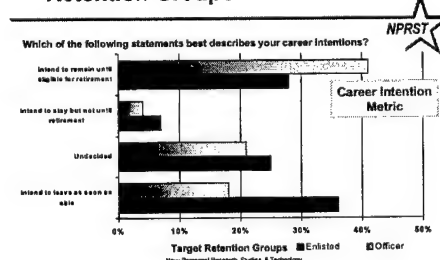
officers stating they would be more likely to leave the Navy if these programs were reduced or eliminated. Again, going against many of the beliefs often held by senior leaders, only 10% said reducing sports and fitness programs would impact their career decisions. Other MWR programs were rated at less than 8% (officer) or not rated at all (enlisted). The survey summary concluded that education programs, MWR programs afloat, and sports/fitness programs were valued most by sailors.¹²

In 1999, the Navy distributed another QoL survey using the life domain approach developed by the Marine Corps. This study provided more detail beyond “do you plan to stay” or “do you plan to stay until retirement.” The charts below show retention rates similar to those reflected in

Re-enlistment Likelihood of Target Retention Groups



Career Intentions for Target Retention Groups



the 1990-1997 Navy-wide personnel surveys but provide more detail regarding “undecideds,” “intent to stay but not until retirement,” etc. Other data illustrated that members who expected to leave the Navy did not believe they had sufficient opportunity to grow and develop personally and found their jobs less challenging than did their counterparts who stated they intended to continue Navy service. Survey analysts recommended that future survey format be expanded to include medical, housing, and non-traditional QoL programs.¹³

DoD-Wide Studies

In 1995, then Secretary of Defense Perry formed the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life. The Task Force was specifically chartered to study military housing, personnel tempo, and community and family services—three of the five elements considered (at the time) to define the quality of life package. This group of researchers did not address the other two, service compensation and medical care. As a result of data collected, the Task Force made several specific recommendations. First, they recommended that the Department of Defense should develop and maintain a database of reasons given for joining and leaving the Services (presumably entrance, exit, and expectation surveys). The report, often called the “Marsh Report,” stated that the database would allow continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken by leadership as well as provide the necessary statistical foundation on which to make decisions affecting quality of life.¹⁴ Second, the Marsh Report suggests that the DoD issue a single, simple formula for counting deployed time: 1 day away = 1 day away. This recommendation is a result of the various Services counting “deployed days” differently—to a military member, a day away from family is counted by them as a day away from family. In order to get a true feeling for how operations (deployments, TDYs, and training) affect personnel morale and quality of life, truth must be added to the system rather than tracking numbers to

“look good.”¹⁵ Third, the Task Force recommended fitness centers be given priority throughout the DoD due to their high rating by all military members. Additionally, researchers identified a need to ensure Fitness Centers and Tuition Assistance programs were standardized across the Service branches. Youth summer-work programs were also identified as needing additional emphasis.¹⁶ Last, the Task Force recommended five strategies be applied to improve community and family life:

- Determine the true need. Validate departmental goals and requirements to ensure they represent the level and type of service wanted in the field.
- Develop methods to measure program effectiveness
- Balance the use of public and private resources. Select a balance of government and private resources that offer the most efficient, effective means of delivering desired services and seek partnerships with civilian communities and agencies.
- Seek appropriate legislative changes
- Stabilize funding for Community and Family Service programs.¹⁷

In closing, the task force surveyed perceptions regarding no other MWR programs beyond fitness, youth, and childcare. Their only reference to what is typically termed “recreation and leisure activities” by the Services was a comment that these programs constituted “healthy diversions” which should focus on single members as recommended by Elyse Kerce in the Marine Corps study.¹⁸

In addition to the Marsh Report, a DoD-wide study was conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in 1999. The CSIS study noted that the very competence the U.S. military has displayed in successfully responding to a wide variety of contingencies seems to have encouraged its further use by national command authorities—and as a result has increased the stress experienced by our men and women in uniform. Additionally, the CSIS report notes that resources are constrained at the operating level in the face of increased demands for the services provided by our armed forces. As a result, the leadership of the armed forces today faces a series of difficult choices on how best to spend available resources.

Researchers also note that as a result of increased stress, military personnel are displaying declining trust and confidence in the institution and leaders. Left unchecked, these problems could have profound, long-term negative consequences for the underlying culture. CSIS states that systemic solutions, not short-term fixes, must be found.¹⁹ Continuing, survey respondents shared that pay and benefits as well as long periods of family separation were reasons for leaving military service. Furthermore, unmet expectations for a challenging and satisfying military lifestyle were identified as a larger issue in nearly every focus group. Recommendations from the study which fall within the scope of this paper include correcting the current imbalance between available resources and requirements and meet the reasonable quality-of-life expectations.²⁰

What's Missing?

Having looked at what's surveyed, it's equally important to look at what's omitted. Despite the need to be able to track perceptions throughout the military service-cycle, no Service currently surveys new entrants to determine their expectations regarding military life. Additionally, only the Army consistently asks members to compare aspects of military life to what they would expect if they were employed in the civilian sector. The Marine Corps has included some civilian-military comparisons but does not ask it's soldiers to look at all aspects of military life such as pay, housing, time for leisure, etc., when making comparisons. No prioritization of QoL programs is included in any QoL survey—the Navy comes closest by asking which program reductions would most likely impact career decisions. Furthermore, no QoL survey currently asks troops to provide input regarding “acceptability ranges” on tough issues such as deployments, time spent at work, etc. We measure how many days away from home and how many hours are spent at work but do not ask our men and women what's

acceptable in a world of tough choices. Exit surveys for members retiring and separating from military service are only performed by the Air Force. No Service follows-up with these departing personnel to ask whether post-military life met their expectations and what military programs they believed would have had the most impact on their families while they were still in the military. Finally, military spouses are generally ignored from QoL surveys. The only QoL survey completed by spouses is the DOD Active Duty and Spouses Survey which has not yet published the results of its 1999 survey. Instead, the Services rely on the military member providing perceptions of QoL issues for not only themselves but their families—ignoring the fact that spouses have incredible influence on career decisions and often view military life very differently than do their active duty spouses.

Notes

¹ Jennifer Palmer, "Airmen: We want more help, more pay, fewer hours," *Air Force Times*, 7 February 2000, 10.

² Charles Hamilton, Chief, Survey Branch, *Executive Summary of 1997 CSAF Climate and Quality of Life Survey* (San Antonio, Tex.: Air Force Personnel Center, 1998).

³ Charles Hamilton, Chief, Survey Branch, *Summary of 1996 Careers and New Directions Surveys* (San Antonio, Tex.: Air Force Personnel Center, 1998).

⁴ LTC Michael G. Clark, *Where Have All Our Captains Gone? An Analysis of Why Junior Army Officers Are Leaving The Service* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 1999) 11-19.

⁵ Sean D. Naylor, "Growing Dissatisfaction with Army Life/Top Reasons Why Soldiers Plan to Leave: Inadequate Salaries, Family Separations," *Army Times*, 13 December 1999, 10.

⁶ Debra S. August, *Army Life v. Life in the Army: the Relationship Between Quality of Life Program Utilization and Army Career Intentions* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Graduate School, 1996) 39-40.

⁷ Elyse W. Kerce, *Quality of Life in the U.S. Marine Corps* (San Diego, Calif.: Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, January 1995) 26.

⁸ Kerce, 148.

⁹ Kerce, 130 and 155-157.

¹⁰ John Kantor and Murrey Olmsted, *Navy-wide Personnel Survey (NPS) 1990-1997: Summary of Trends* (San Diego, Calif.: Navy Personnel Research and Development Center, November 1998) 1.

¹¹ Kantor and Olmsted, 12-14.

¹² Dr. Gerry Wilcove, briefing on *U.S. Navy Quality of Life Study Life Domains Questionnaire 1999 Results* (Millington, Tenn.: Navy Personnel Command, 18 October 1999).

Notes

¹³ Dr. Gerry Wilcove, briefing on *1997 Quality of Life Survey* (Millington, Tenn.: Navy personnel Command, February 1998).

¹⁴ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life*, October 1995, 1.

¹⁵ *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life*, 8.

¹⁶ *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life*, 13-14 and 109-112.

¹⁷ *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life*, 97-98.

¹⁸ *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life*, 112.

¹⁹ *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century—Executive Summary*, A Report of the CSIS International Security Program, February 2000, No. 12; on-line, Internet, 9 February 2000, available from <http://www.csis.org/pubs/am21exec.html>, 5-7.

²⁰ *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century—Executive Summary*, 11-12.

Part 4

Recommendations

Leadership is serious about narrowing the QoL gap and strives to respond to factors identified in QoL surveys. For example, senior leaders have pushed for changes to the retirement system and a return to the Hi-3/50 % Retirement Program, pushed for pay raises and pay table reform, developed the Phoenix Aviator Program to encourage more airline bound pilots to stay on active duty until twenty years of service, improved Reserve/Guard commissary access, and are attempting to make housing allowances and out-of-pocket expenses more equitable. Other noteworthy efforts include improving TRICARE, funding needed construction projects, and trying to continue a sense of community within the organization. But there is just so much to do! As a House Armed Services Committee Aide said, "We do not have money to fix everything. We hear reports pointing out a bunch of problems. We need help determining what is the top priority."¹ General Ryan, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, echoed those thoughts when he said, "It's all about prioritization; it's like going into a grocery store with just a few dollars in your pocket. You decide what's most important and purchase those things first."² Without prioritization we are only guessing whether the changes we're making will bring about the desired outcome (increased retention and readiness).

While surveys like those discussed in the previous section can tell us that our military want higher pay, better housing, more leisure time, less time away from family, and better equipment

and increased manning in their units, they can't currently tell us which of these items is most important. As a result, leadership tries to approach several items and hope those actions will improve morale enough to positively impact retention—and therefore readiness. Unfortunately, what DoD leadership thinks is “significant improvement” is not always perceived that way by the troops. For instance, the January 2000 pay raise amounted to approximately \$111-\$45 per month (after tax) for the majority of active duty personnel (O-3s and below). The July 2000 pay table adjustment provides virtually no increase in pay to O-3s and below. There is no doubt that the pay table reform is perceived well within the field grade officer ranks since little additional pay was previously provided for the increased responsibility these top grades bring. However, most of the force structure is at the O-3 and below level, thereby making the majority of the force feel that they have gained little from two pay raises that are much touted as “great achievements” and “huge military pay raises” by DoD leadership.³ Therefore, it is important to combine asking the troop his/her opinion on prioritization of quality of life areas/services with specific questions that allow leadership to zero in on specific targets identified by the various groups. To bridge the current communication gap between senior leaders and the troops, recommend four surveys be developed and utilized throughout DoD: 1) an entrance “expectation survey; 2) a perennial QoL Survey administered by each Service; 3) exit surveys for separating and retiring personnel; 4) and a follow-up survey 2-3 years after departure from military service. Details regarding these four suggested surveys are as follows:

- Develop Expectation Surveys to be administered to individuals entering the armed forces. This tool can help match actual deliverables to expectations—or if necessary change recruiting messages to impact expectations. An example of why this is important is the area of continuing education. Some Services emphasize serving a term and then using college funds after separating from the military (scholarships and GI Bill). Others, such as the Air Force, emphasize entering active duty and working on continuing education while serving (tuition assistance). If Air Force recruits expect to work on their education from active duty but then are unable because of deployments, they are likely to be dissatisfied. However, if

this initial expectation is measured and then compared with follow-up data, partnering with colleges and universities to develop distance learning programs can alleviate the problem. Deliverables now better match expectations. Expectation surveys also take on new meaning in light of changing demographics. As more minorities, women, and older individuals enter the armed forces will the same programs offered for the past thirty years meet their expectations?⁴

- Develop a perennial QoL survey to be administered by each Service every two years. Specific recommendations regarding what should be included in the department-wide survey are:
 - Include comparisons to civilian sector. As the Marine Corps and Army studies showed, having respondents share whether they think pay/benefits, retirement, medical benefits, promotion opportunity, quality of life, and leisure time would be better if they were in the civilian sector can tell decision makers a lot about perceptions.
 - Add measurable instruments to assess “acceptability ranges”—especially on the tough issues. We know long days, deployments, etc. aren’t going to disappear. By adding measurable instruments, senior leaders can gauge what the target should be. Possible questions include: *What’s an acceptable out-of-pocket housing expense? In your opinion, what type of housing do you feel is appropriate to your income/status (i.e., 3 bed/2 bath duplex, 4 bed/3 bath house, square footage requirement, etc.)? How much do you feel pay should increase to in order to be fair and equitable? What’s an acceptable length of assignment? How often should a military family be expected to move? Given the military mission and the need to balance family requirements, what’s an acceptable number of days away from home annually? What’s an acceptable workweek? What should minimum levels of manning be for your unit?* Such questions could help minimize the misunderstandings as has become common with the recent reform of Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH). Much of the difference between what the contracted research firm recommended and what troops expect points to a difference in expectations regarding what’s considered appropriate housing for certain pay grades.⁵
 - Include an opportunity for the troops to prioritize QoL areas according to how they impact their satisfaction with the military and their decision to continue service. This is key to understanding how to get the desired outcome (retention and readiness) with a limited amount of dollars.
 - Include question regarding their perceptions of their compatibility with Service life. This may help leadership discard the opinions of those that probably do not need to be retained.
 - Include questions regarding their intent to stay as well as their intent to recommend the armed forces to others. Using the Navy example, include questions referencing how long they expect to stay and what factors affect their decision. We tend to focus only on whether a military member intends to stay until retirement despite the fact we don’t want everyone to stay a full twenty years. Today’s generations, Generation Xers and Ys as

they are often referred (those born since 1964), tend to look at employment in shorter chunks than did the Baby Boomers before them.⁶

- Include spouses. Provide surveys both electronically as well as in paper version to facilitate spouse participation since not all households have access to electronic versions. More of the force than ever before is married: 40% of junior enlisted members, 85% of mid-grade enlisted members, 94% of senior enlisted members are married, 64% of junior officers are married, and 92% of senior officers are married.⁷ As Gill and Haurin point out in their article, "Wherever He May Go: How Wives Affect Their Husband's Career Decisions," spouses have a significant impact on member's career decisions.⁸ The data collected from the military member means nothing if it is opposite of what the spouse believes.
- Include questions regarding whether QoL areas meet expectations. Whether expectations are met or aren't met has significant influence on satisfaction levels. For instance, military members expect they won't be home 365 days a year. Deployments (if not too frequent) can actually enhance retention since many troops experience a sense of usefulness or worth as was noted in a recent *DefenseLink* article.⁹ However, if members expect to not be gone every Christmas, or more than 120 days in a two year period leadership can use that data to develop programs to meet those needs (when possible) or work towards influencing the expectation.
- Exit surveys need to be a routine part of business in all Services for both those separating and those retiring. While separation exit surveys are occasionally done, we assume the retiring member must be satisfied—after all, they wouldn't stay if they weren't satisfied. However, do we know what they are satisfied with? Also, for many retiring members high-year-tenure (HYT) has not been reached and service continuation is an option. Were they merely "holding on:" because they had too much vested to not wait for the retirement check or are they simply moving on to other things? Would they recommend a military career to friends and family?
- Developing a follow-up survey 2-3 years after termination of military service, be it through retirement or separation, would provide data regarding whether civilian life met or didn't meet their expectations. Often, individuals displeased with military service find life may not be as "rosy" in the civilian sector as believed. Likewise, civilian life may measure up or surpass expectations. Since the civilian sector and negative perceptions have significant impact on retention, it is imperative that as much feedback as possible be gathered in order to affect policies, programs, and marketing efforts that can impact expectations and perceptions.

Each of the four surveys described above should be brokered by DoD to emphasize common data collection to facilitate better cross-Service comparisons and prioritization of resources at the congressional and DoD levels. As the QoL Executive Committee points out, the number of

operations have increased the propensity for soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to share ideas and look at issues collectively.¹⁰ However, each Service must be permitted to tailor the DoD survey to meet specific Service needs. For example, because it is vital that foot soldiers emphasize “team” in order to meet their mission, the Army and Marine Corps may need to tailor questions regarding single member housing. Additionally, actions resulting from survey inputs may also call for Service-specific solutions vice DoD-wide solutions. For instance, setting pay is a DoD issue; however, determining living requirements for single, junior enlisted personnel may require different responses depending on the Service culture and core values. For example, the Marine Corps may need to focus off-duty QoL initiatives to single members whereas the Air Force may need to focus more on family programs.

It’s also imperative that each of the survey analyses provides comprehensive comparisons by gender, rank, career specialty, marital status, etc. By using good data management methods, various breakouts and comparisons can be made to determine QoL attitudes and needs. Possible rank groupings may include include first termers, junior NCOs (E-5 through E-6), Senior NCOs (E-7s and above), junior officers (O-1 through O-3s with less than 8 years of service), senior O-3s with 8 years of more of service, mid-grade officers (O-4s through O-5s), and senior officers (O-6s and above). These groups will have differing needs and also have differing retention targets. For instance, if pilots with 14 years of service are separating or senior captains are exiting in greater numbers than expected, this method of survey/analysis would allow better targeting of actions. Also, using marital status as a focus (married less than 5 years, married more than 5 years, never been married, divorced), attitudinal differences regarding deployments and family separation may take on greater meaning. For instance, married personnel with young marriages may need more support from base agencies adapting to the stresses of separation.

Finally, QoL initiatives must be marketed and matched to survey results. Senior leaders often work with the media and public relations sector to get the word out on survey results and then on program initiatives such as TRICARE, BAH, pay raises, etc. However, we don't link them! Suggest routine marketing efforts include "matching." An example might be, *"In last year's DoD QoL Survey 75% of military members and their families said pay, deployment frequency, fitness program availability, medical care, and family shopping programs were most important to their quality of life and satisfaction with military life. As a result, we have asked Congress for a ___% pay raise, ___ change to TRICARE, increased funding for shopping programs, and renewed emphasis on family fitness programs."* It's important to remember that the obvious may not always be obvious. The troops (and their families) must know they've been heard and that they have an impact on decisions affecting their quality of life. Even in cases where something ceases to occur it should always be linked to troop input.

Notes

¹ Rick Maze, "Survey Will Query Career Intentions, Quality of Life," *Army Times*, 2 August 1999, 13.

² TSgt Michael Spaits, "AF Simplifies Quality Processes," *U.S. Air Force ONLINE News*, 2 February 2000, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 10 February 2000, available from http://www.af.mil/newspaper/v2_n4/v2_n4_s5.htm.

³ Rick Maze, "Congress Calls for Survey of Military Departures," *Navy Times*, 14 June 1999, 9.

⁴ Raymond S. Nickerson, *Looking Ahead: Human Factors Challenges in a Changing World* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992) 309.

⁵ Tom Philpott, "Housing Allowance Rate Protection Doesn't End Gripes," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 30 January 2000, 6B.

⁶ VADM P.A. Tracey, address 22 January 2000.

⁷ "Correspondence from Readers," *The Research Digest*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 7 of 28; on-line, Internet, 8 December 1999, available from <http://mfi.marywood.edu/RESEARCH/INFOTRAN/MFIDigest/Vol2Num3/DigV2N3.htm>.

⁸ H. Leroy Gill and Donald R. Haurin, "Wherever He May Go: How Wives Affect Their Husband's Career Decisions," *Social Science Research*, 1998, 277-278.

⁹ Linda D. Kozaryn, "Defense Leaders Champion Troop Needs," *DefenseLink*, 6 January 2000, No. 4; on-line, Internet, 27 January 2000, available from http://www.defenseselink.mil/news/Jan2000/n01062000_20001061.html.

Notes

¹⁰ Quality of Life Executive Committee description, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 12 October 1999, available from <http://dticaw.dtic.mil/prhome/qol.html>.

Part 5

Conclusions

Quality of life is intrinsically linked to retention. However, today's senior leaders must recognize that what was desired by their generation may not be desired by today's uniformed personnel. A recent *Army Times* article succinctly stated some of the generation differences in a new way, "*Generation Xers tend to be children of parents who both held jobs, and as a result they felt deprived of their parent's company. Therefore, they are determined to organize their own lives to incorporate a greater degree of family time than they enjoyed growing up.*"¹ These changes in values don't necessarily mean that all personnel and family oriented services and programs need to be dismantled in favor of enhancing pay and monetary benefits.² Such action could have an unwanted outcome of sending military members looking for the highest salary since the camaraderie, family support, and sense of community would have been "sold off."

What's most significant in the dozens of articles and research projects studied, is that the **soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines (and their families) must determine what is most important among the myriad of quality of life needs. Congressional commissions, outside research organizations, and even senior DoD leadership should not themselves decide what's most important.** Opinion through surveys is no longer sufficient. It is vital that the troop be given the status that he or she has earned through their diligent service and be treated as the key QoL advisor to DoD leadership. Then, it becomes the task of the Service chiefs, DoD

leadership, and Congress to package those priorities with national resources to meet national needs. To help this vital communication, four DoD-sponsored, Service-administered surveys should be developed. Emphasis should be placed on prioritizing needs, measuring expectations to perceptions before, during, and after military service, including spouses, and designing surveys such that cross-Service comparisons and decisions are facilitated. The final link in the communication chain is conveying to the troops (and their families) how their feedback was specifically used to effect program and budget decisions.

The force is changing. The mission is changing. How well we adapt to those changes will determine our how successful we are in meeting the demands of the American people—deterring and winning the nation's wars. Working together and developing the communication tools between them, senior leaders and our uniformed personnel can make the armed services both the efficient profession of arms that it needs to be and an employer of choice to those who accomplish that mission.

Notes

¹ Sean D Naylor, "Captains Parting Company/Why the Army Can't Keep Junior Officers." *Army Times*, 24 January 2000, 12.

² Gary L Bowen and James A. Martin, "Community Capacity: A Core Component of the 21st Century Military Community," *The Research Digest*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1-5 of 28; on-line, Internet, 8 December 1999, available from <http://mfi.marywood.edu/RESEARCH/INFOTRAN/MFIDigest/Vol2Num3/DigV2N3.htm>.

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